

NEWS

CRP Gets a Facelift

Since 1985, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has safeguarded millions of acres of American topsoil and wildlife habitat and has improved our air and water quality. In fact, CRP is the Federal Government's single largest environmental improvement program on private lands. Now FSA is working to update and streamline the administrative processes for the program that has done so much to revitalize our Nation's resources.

In June, a 25-member team made up of FSA Conservation and Environmental Programs Division (CEPD) employees, FSA field office staff, and headquarters and field office Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees met for three days in Alexandria, Va. Their goal was to work on reengineering CRP as part of the service center implementation (SCI) initiative. SCI seeks to improve customer service by providing collocated USDA agencies the ability to share data and deliver services using up-to-date technology. Reengineered processes will be programmed to operate in the new common computing environment (CCE). Employees who work with CRP and disaster programs are tackling this revamping process first, but eventually all other program areas in FSA and NRCS will step up for the change.

The CRP team, working with a contractor, is developing a personal computer web-based system for FSA, NRCS, and producers to interact on CRP. Use of this structure and the CCE means that the two agencies will



Bill Gray, FSA, Ind.; Jim Williams, FSA, Washington, D.C.; Martin Lowenfisch, FSA intern, Washington, DC.; Cheryl Zavodny, FSA, Washington, D.C.; and Robin Elms, FSA, Mo.



Perdue University Professor Bernie Engel; C.W. Scott, NRCS, Colo.; Virgil Ireland, FSA, Washington, D.C.; and Margaret Arnold, FSA, Washington, D.C.

*See **FACELIFT**, continued on page 3*

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

Help is Only a Phone Call Away

Stress.

Stress means many different things. It can come from something small like missing a bus, or from something large like a divorce. It can be fleeting and be gone within a few minutes (another bus came by?). Or it can stay with you for a long, long time; perhaps unresolved anger from years ago is showing up at work. It's usually a combination of big and small problems that can lead to headaches, stomach upsets, anger, feelings of loss of control, and even depression. Stress at the workplace can boil over into your home life, and vice versa.

We're fortunate, nowadays, that these concerns are being addressed where we work. There is help available for any employee who needs it. And many of us have needed that help, especially during times of exceptional workload and pressure. As Secretary Glickman said in June at our Kansas City, Mo. facility, "I know your

achievements required great sacrifice, dedication, and some very long hours and canceled vacations." I know this too. I see it here in Washington, and I hear about it from the field offices. I know the impact this can have on people. With reorganizations, budget cuts, disaster relief, and special loan and other programs, most of us have experienced stress or have other concerns that are affecting our mental and physical health. I want everyone to know about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the help that's available to you.

FSA designates funds to provide EAP counseling and referral services for all employees and their family members. Counseling is free during the assessment period. Management consultation is also available to resolve workplace issues. EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you feel stressed or have a personal, family, or work-related concern that is affecting your well-being, conduct, or job performance, don't wait any longer. Turn to EAP for immediate, confidential help. EAP addresses physical, psychological, and organizational health issues through counseling and problem solving.

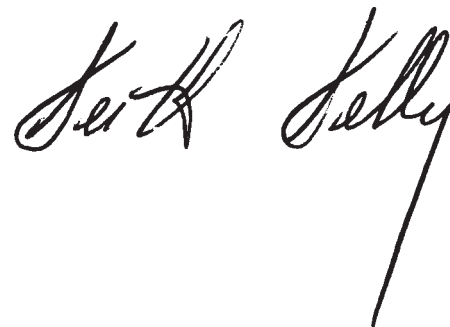
Licensed EAP counselors can help you work through many concerns, including:

- work/family life issues
- emotional issues
- depression
- elder care concerns
- grief
- stress
- alcohol/drug dependencies
- gambling
- spousal/child/parent abuse

Please do not hesitate to take advantage of this assistance. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness, and we ALL need help sometimes. Often, just a friend listening to us can help; other times, an objective professional may be needed. If you would like to make an appointment and are located in the National Office, call Business Health Services at (800) 222-0364 or (888) 262-7848 (TDD). If you work in a field office, contact Green Spring Health Services at (800) 523-5668 or (800) 882-7610 (TDD). Remember — the sooner you seek help, the sooner your problems can be resolved.

For more information about EAP, visit the Human Resources Division's (HRD) Intranet website at: <http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/hrd/default.htm>

If you have comments, suggestions, or concerns about EAP, please e-mail Juliet McBride, HRD, at: juliet_mcbride@wdc.fsa.usda.gov



FSA NEWS

is published monthly in the interest of all FSA employees.

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FACELIFT

continued from front page

be able to review and update the same CRP data and will allow producers access to their CRP contract data. This will greatly simplify the entire CRP process — from receiving and evaluating a producer's offer to processing checks and ensuring program compliance.

During the meetings, team members considered what types of data the agencies need to share and what information producers need online. Cheryl Zavodny, Conservation Programs Branch (CPB) Chief, explains, "The meetings were a great chance to first analyze how well CRP works now, then look forward and plan for CRP's future." The team is also working to ensure that, with the new system, the integrity and validity of the shared data will be maintained.

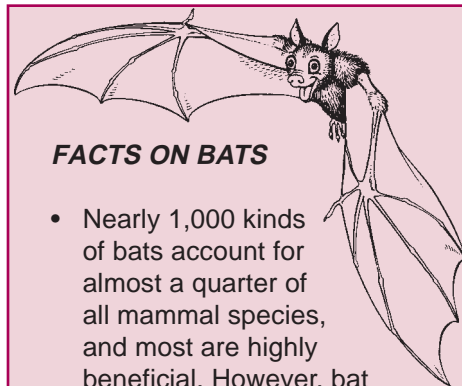
Further down the line, producers will be able to submit offers, complete forms, and check their contract history and status on their own computers. Virgil Ireland, CPB, adds, "In the initial stage, we expect that producers will feel more comfortable coming into field offices to submit offers, etc. But in the long term, the improved service of using a web-based system will really benefit them. And, accepting offers and doing other tasks on-line will be much quicker and easier for FSA field employees."

"I'm really excited about what this will mean for CRP," says Zavodny. "A common computing environment will be more efficient, reducing redundant data entry and increasing data

consistency. It will save the service center employees from many routine and duplicative tasks and free up their time to better serve producers. I only wish that the whole system could be fully available this year to help service centers manage heavy workloads." C.W. Scott, an NRCS team member from Fort Morgan, Colo., cautions the team to remain forward looking on CRP and to keep open to different types of computer applications. "Also, one of the things I really want to come out of this," he says, "is a quicker implementation in the field of the Geographic Information Systems software. It would be so useful for CRP."

The working meetings were really phase II of the modification process. During phase I, CEPD piloted an automation of the CRP offer form at the Scottsburg, Ind. USDA Service Center. "Offices shared the form electronically and the response from both FSA and NRCS was highly favorable," says Jim Williams, Branch Chief of CEPD's Planning, Evaluation, and Automation Branch. "Our goal during phase II is to build on that foundation."

A sub-group of team members and the contractor is now developing the pilot computer program based on the outcome of phase I and the CRP team meetings. The next big step comes with the next CRP signup — up to nine service center sites around the country will test the pilot system and, CEPD hopes, find that CRP signup can be as easy as point and click.



FACTS ON BATS

- Nearly 1,000 kinds of bats account for almost a quarter of all mammal species, and most are highly beneficial. However, bat populations are in alarming decline worldwide, and in North America bats are the most endangered land mammals.
- Bats are primary predators of beetles, moths, leaf hoppers, and other agricultural pests. A single brown bat can catch 1,200 mosquito-sized insects in just one hour.
- In the wild, bananas, peaches, mangoes, cashews, dates, and figs rely on bats for pollination and seed dispersal.

— Source: *Bat Conservation International, Inc.*

A Passion for Dairy Farming

by Susan Hunter, Public Affairs Specialist, Wisconsin State FSA Office

Mike Madison says he was “obsessed” with farming even as a young boy, constantly reading up on it and drawing pictures of his parents’ dairy farm and its animals. For a young man who fondly recalls spending countless hours working with his dad on the farm, imagine how gratifying it is that he can now call the farm his own. The FSA office in Appleton, Wis. helped him and his wife Jodie make it happen with a beginning farmer farm ownership loan and a direct operating loan.

The Madisons are from Seymour, Wis., where dairy farming is everywhere. Jodie, a speech and language therapist, grew up on a farm just up the road from Mike’s home. She remembers being in the barn since she could walk and cherishes her rural upbringing. “I knew at an early age that I wanted to raise my children on a farm and was excited about Mike’s future plans to be a farmer,” she says.

The couple had their eye on Mike’s parents’ farm, and for good reason — they’d been operating its 157 acres since 1995. But they lacked sufficient cash flow and collateral to make the farm their own. “Buying into the farm was the biggest obstacle,” Mike says. “It’s hard to do when you have nothing for a downpayment and no easy way to build equity.”

Not to be discouraged, the couple met with Nicole Massey, an FSA Farm Loan Officer in Appleton. Massey guided the Madisons through the ins and outs of securing their loans. The Madisons bought the farm this year and used their operating loan to purchase a haybine and chopper and to refinance livestock Mike purchased from his parents. “Without the funding from FSA, we probably would have had to settle for another farm,” Mike says.

The Madisons now count 62 milking cows, 18 bred heifers, 19 open heifers, and 21 calves in their herd. They plan to add another 18 cows and buy

a computer to keep better records of their herd, but will take things slowly. “Investing money wisely is the key, and we won’t move ahead on any project unless it makes sense and is something we can really afford to do,” Mike explains. In addition to their farm loans, the Madisons receive loan deficiency and Agricultural Market Transition Act payments, which go toward farm improvements. Thanks to the payments, the Madisons’ cows can now kick back in 67 new barn stalls complete with cow mattresses.

Mike and Jodie say the staff at the FSA office was supportive and welcoming. Mike says, “They really worked with us to ensure that things went smoothly.” The Madisons also appreciated the flexibility FSA provided. “They didn’t dictate how we should run our operation,” Mike says. Jodie adds that, “Nicole Massey listened to our plans and did all she could to inform us ahead of time what to expect.” Any down side? The couple was a bit daunted by all the paperwork, though they said it was worth it in the end.

With all the talk of young people losing interest in farming, the Madisons are determined to show others that one can make a good living at it. They believe the future of agriculture is good in their area, and they say many of their friends from high school share the same passion and are either farming or are involved in some type of agribusiness. The Madisons acknowledge that farming can be risky and that lack of affordable funding can be a major obstacle, but believe that those who really want to get into farming usually find a way. Jodie and Mike strongly encourage other young farmers to keep focused, stay patient, and be prepared to sacrifice — it’s all worth it. Mike takes agribusiness classes at a nearby technical college; he stresses that this is an excellent way to get help and keep up with technology and new crops.

This enthusiastic, astute young couple is proof that along with a passion for farming, an investment in knowledge is a key to success.



Mike and Jodie Madison.

FSA Website Becomes World Traveler

As schoolkids in Israel flip open their geography textbooks this fall, they'll see something that's foreign to them — but not to FSA employees. A photo of FSA's homepage is shown in the book, along with a description of our website, designed and maintained by FSA's webmaster in Public Affairs and FSA content providers across the country.

An Israeli company, the Centre for Educational Technology (CET), recently published the 238-page Hebrew textbook called *Geography of Settlements*. CET is a non-profit organization for the advancement of education and training in Israel. Their geography unit wrote the textbook for junior-high-school students as an introduction to rural and urban settlements.

The section in which our website appears covers the differences between modern and traditional agriculture. Noa Netanel, a CET employee, says the company included our website to show students "an example of the easy access to professional information that farmers in developed countries have." Netanel says CET chose our site because it's "a good source of information, and the homepage photo 'delivers' the idea to the students."

Several thousand students now use the recently published book, and Netanel expects that when the book reaches full circulation, 20-30,000 students per year will use it. CET is also publishing the book in a limited edition in Arabic for the Arab population in Israel.



Cover of the Israeli textbook *Geography of Settlements*.

FSA website visits by country in July 1999

U.S.	103,904
Canada	283
Japan	214
United Kingdom	139
Australia	119
Mexico	94
Germany	87
Argentina	72
France	69
Switzerland	58
Malaysia	56
Brazil	55
Belgium	41
South Korea	40
Hong Kong	39
All Other Int'l	581

Total	105,851
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Textbook page showing FSA's homepage. The caption under the homepage photo reads: "An Internet site which provides American farmers current information on subjects which are important to them." The caption also includes our site address.

Task Force Centers on NAP

A 13-member task force from around the country met in Washington, D.C. in July to propose changes to the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). NAP provides assistance for crops affected by natural disasters for which crop insurance is not available. The task force came together to work on providing a more accessible safety net for the non-insured farmer.

Task force members discussed crop eligibility, program benefit levels, and automation, among other issues. They unanimously agreed that changes are vital because producers are dissatisfied with perceived cumbersome eligibility requirements and low payments. The task force proposed both red sky and blue sky recommendations — red sky meaning changes to the existing program and blue sky meaning a re-vamp of the program.

The next step? Farm Programs will review task force recommendations, then work on formulating policy changes.



NAP Task Force and Washington, D.C. NAP Branch members, left to right: NAP Branch Chief Sean O'Neill, Earline Brown, Wanda Johnson, Elsie Williams, Debbie O'Donoghue, Rich Longman, John Newcomer, Steve Maddux (Fla.), Ivan Johnson (Neb.), Sallee TenEyck (N.Y.), Sherry Elson (Idaho), Jim Lawson, Jeannette Pitcher, Aaron Martin (N.C.), Steve Peterson, Jeff Yasui (Calif.), and Doug Bailey (Ill.). Not pictured: Danny Noble (Texas), Nancy Peterson (Mont.), Ken Nagel (EDSO), Jerry Alanko (PECD), Sharon Davis, and Terry Hill.



Rich Longman and Sherry Elson deep in discussion on NAP.



WHAT'S THAT I SMELL?

According to a Yale University study, coffee and peanut butter are the two most recognizable food scents.

— Source: *Food Lines*



Agriculture Day Uncovers the Mystery of Hydroponics

by Charles Deputy, CED, Switzerland County FSA Office, Ind.

My office has the whole school year to scout out a really special local farm. Each spring we combine efforts with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension Service (CES), our Soil and Water Conservation District, and several agricultural organizations to take fourth-graders and their parents on a farm tour.

This last spring we took the kids to Roger and Lisa Garland's farm. The Garland family members were gracious hosts and took an active role in the tour — Roger gave demonstrations on using draft horse power



Chuck Deputy demonstrates how burley tobacco plants grow in water.

versus machine power, Lisa talked about dairy cattle, and their daughters covered beef cattle and poultry

production. CES talked about the garden and orchard areas, and I showed the kids how hydroponics (cultivating plants in water rather than soil) works to grow tobacco, flowers, vegetables, and other crops.

We chose the Garlands' farm because of its diversity — few farms remain with such varied operations all in one location. I really enjoyed introducing the kids and their parents to hydroponics — a technology that was totally new to

a lot of them. The kids enjoyed their outing and came away with a better understanding of agriculture.

Ohio's Cabbage Patch...Adults

by Michael Kaufman, Public Affairs Specialist, Ohio State FSA Office

What can be done with cabbages that while perfectly healthy, are too small to be sold commercially? Donate them, of course. In June, FSA employees in Columbus, Ohio helped glean and distribute softball-sized cabbages to some very grateful organizations that provide food to those who know hunger first-hand.

The FSA employees joined forces with Natural Resources Conservation Service and Rural Development volunteers for this project. A dozen state office employees linked up with a dozen field office workers to harvest the surplus on Forrest Turner's vegetable farm in Scioto County. Local churches, relief organizations, and the Salvation Army were given as many cabbages as they could haul. In all, USDA employees and others loaded cars and pickups with 3,000 pounds of cabbages.

Ohio FSA employees' commitment to food donation is evident in the framework they've developed to locate and recover surplus and unmarketable agricultural goods. While staff members work with local farmers to find surpluses, State Gleaning Coordinator, Chris Piper, has asked county offices to call her with information about any reported field loss. And, Ohio FSA has put out the word that anyone, including local organizations, wishing to participate in food recovery efforts can call their local FSA office for help.

Gleaning fields lets farmers make a direct contribution to feeding the hungry. And, those who collect and distribute the surplus feel great about their role in the process. But, while many of us feel a humanitarian responsibility to help those in need, often a major obstacle is the logistics of getting what is available to those who can use it. That's why the Ohio FSA employees have stepped in — they know that the potential for food recovery is tremendous if only people are given a chance to help out.



People being attacked by giant Brussels sprouts? No, it's undersized cabbages harvested by USDA employees.



Steven Maurer, State Executive Director, Ohio, and Chris Piper, State Office Gleaning Coordinator.

WORLD'S LARGEST CAKE

To celebrate Fort Payne, Ala.'s centennial in 1989, the city baked the world's largest cake. Shaped like the state, the chocolate concoction weighed 58.08 tons (128,238 pounds) and was topped with 7.35 tons (16,209 pounds) of frosting. The cake was prepared by EarthGrains, a local bakery.

— Source: *The Food Files*





Will it Rain? Ask Your Cow.

In the days before we used science and technology to predict weather, farmers used weather proverbs to explain their environment. While today we rely on radar and satellites for accuracy, our scientific instruments will never have the charm or poetic grace as these old sayings:

Sow wheat in the dust and your bins will bust.
Sow wheat in the mud and your wheat is a dud.

A sun-shiny shower won't last a half-hour.

Snow like cotton, soon forgotten; snow like cornmeal, will snow a great deal.

When cows run with tails in the air, weather will hit us like a raging bear.

Plant turnips in July, wet or dry.

Ring around the sun, time to have fun; ring around the moon, rain coming soon.

If the rooster crows after he goes to bed,
he will wake up with a wet head.

When the wind blows from the east, the fishes bite the least.

Source: Ohio Farm Bureau



Answers to August's Puzzle

	C	H	L	O	R	O	P	H	Y	L	L
G	E	O		A	K		A		E		E
O		T		K			T	A	N	D	E
O	U	T	R	E	A	C	H				O
S		O		S		L		L	O	G	O
E		N	E		O	D	D		U		A
	T		G			A			S		I
G	O	R	G	E		P	R	E	E	N	E

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
September 1-2	Amarillo, Texas	Administrator Kelly to attend National Grain Sorghum Producers educational tour
September 13-14	Chicago, Ill.	Administrator Kelly to attend National Agricultural Credit Committee conference
September 15 - October 15		Hispanic Heritage Month
September 24-29	St. George, Utah	Administrator Kelly to attend NASDA conference

Note: The above is subject to change.